



NEWS

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Citrus Heights Man Arrested in Computer Hacking Scheme

SACRAMENTO, Calif. - The California Highway Patrol (CHP) today arrested George Samuel Bronk, 23, of Citrus Heights, on 30 felony counts associated with computer intrusion, identity theft, child pornography and extortion.

The arrest culminated a two-month investigation that began in August when the CHP's Computer Crimes Investigations Unit (CCIU) received a request for assistance from the Connecticut State Police. Information obtained by the State Police from a victim in Connecticut led to the CHP serving a search warrant at Bronk's Citrus Heights home where several items of electronic evidence was seized.

The subsequent investigation revealed that Bronk, using his personal computer, unlawfully accessed more than 170 e-mail and Facebook accounts of women throughout the United States, including California and the initial victim in Connecticut. E-mail addresses to each of the unlawfully accessed accounts were located amongst a compiled list of 3,200 e-mail profiles found on Bronk's computer.

"It's clear that the suspect in this case had successfully infiltrated numerous accounts of unsuspecting victims," said CHP Commissioner Joe Farrow.

Bronk's criminal activity appears to have taken place from September 2009 through September 2010, during which time he targeted victims by scanning for information on Facebook's social networking website. He then electronically contacted the victim's e-mail service provider, utilized the forgotten password process, and guessed security questions posed by the e-mail service provider. Once Bronk gained access to the e-mail account, the victim was locked out.

After gaining access to the e-mail account, Bronk searched the victim's "sent mail" folder for nude or semi-nude photographs and videos, which he then sent to the victim's entire e-mail address book from the victim's e-mail account. He also downloaded the pictures and videos to his personal computer.

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In many cases, he posted the nude photographs to galleries on victims' Facebook pages and to other Internet sites and made posted comments on the Facebook sites of the victims' friends.

In an online chat session with one victim, Bronk demanded the victim send him more sexually explicit photographs of herself. He threatened to post photographs he already possessed of the victim more widely if the victim did not comply. The victim complied.

In addition to the evidence discovered relative to the unlawful access of e-mail and Facebook accounts, extortion, and identity theft, more than 1,100 images and 50 videos of child pornography were located on Bronk's computer and a portable hard drive.

With the discovery of additional potential victims, the CHP has initiated a joint investigation with the Sacramento Valley Hi-Tech Crimes Task Force and the FBI and is being assisted by the California Attorney General's Office. Anyone who believes they may be a victim in this case should contact the CHP's CCIU at cciu-tipline@chp.ca.gov.

The CHP reminds computer users to take steps to safeguard their online accounts, including the security questions associated with these accounts.

"This is yet another example of how personal and sensitive information is readily accessible, and once it hits the Internet, it's very difficult if not impossible to retrieve it," said Commissioner Farrow. "Be careful what you post on social networking sites and send via the Internet."

Steps to safeguard online accounts include:

- Limiting the amount and kinds of information posted on social networking sites. Remove birthdates and parents' names, for example.
- Changing the security questions on e-mail services, banks and other online sites on a regular basis and avoid using information that is available on any social networking site or elsewhere on the Internet. Security answers need to be as secure as passwords.

For more information about identity theft, please see <http://ag.ca.gov/idtheft/> or www.sachitechcops.org/idtheft.htm.

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